

# What Do You Say to 'That's So Gay'

## **STOP IT:**

- Keep it simple with quick responses. You could say:
  - “Remember, we don’t use put-downs in this class.”
  - “It’s not OK to say ‘That’s so gay.’”
  - “It’s not OK to use that phrase.”
  - “What did you mean by that?”
  - “Do you know what ‘gay’ means?”
  - “You may not have meant to be hurtful, but when you use the word ‘gay’ to mean something is bad or stupid, it is hurtful.”
  - “Do you know why it is hurtful?”
- If you have the time and opportunity to educate on the spot, do it. If you don’t, make time later.

## **EDUCATE:**

- If you have been hearing the phrase “That’s so gay” used to mean that something is bad or stupid, take the time during a class meeting or group time to make sure that your students know what “gay” means and know why it is hurtful to use it as an insult.
- Be clear with students that when they use the word “gay” in a negative way they are being disrespectful. Also be clear that using the phrase “That’s so gay” is hurtful to other students who may have parents, siblings, aunts, uncles or other family members who are gay.
- In lessons on respect, stereotypes or prejudice include information about discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

## **BE PROACTIVE:**

- Develop an environment of respect and caring for all students in your class and school.
- Establish clear schoolwide and classroom policies against name-calling and hurtful teasing.
- If you have been hearing the phrase “That’s so gay” in your class or school, be explicit that rules against name-calling include that phrase and other anti-gay put-downs.

## **DON'T IGNORE IT:**

- Ignoring name-calling and hurtful teasing allows it to continue and possibly get worse. If other students do not see action, they get the message that there is nothing wrong with it.
- Harassment does not go away on its own.

## **DON'T BE AFRAID OF MAKING THE SITUATION WORSE:**

- Almost any response is better than ignoring the situation. You may not know exactly what to say, but you must stop the harassment.
- Taking action reaffirms limits. Interrupting name-calling isn’t always easy. With experience you will become more comfortable in handling it.

## **DON'T EXCUSE THE BEHAVIOR:**

- Saying “Josh doesn’t really know what it means,” or “Sarah was only joking,” excuses hurtful behavior.

## **DON'T TRY TO JUDGE HOW UPSET THE VICTIM WAS:**

- We have no way of knowing how a victim is really feeling. Often, victims are embarrassed and pretend that they were not offended or hurt. Saying “Michael didn’t seem upset by Laura’s remark” trivializes the victim’s feelings. It tells the harasser that it is OK to make hurtful comments. It teaches not only the victim but also anyone in hearing range that they will not be protected from harassment.

## **DON'T BE IMMOBILIZED BY FEAR:**

- Making a mistake is far less serious than not acting at all. You can always go back to the student and say or do something else if you feel you did not respond well.

